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ABSTRACT

The double-entry journal requires students to write affective response statements to readings, and to compare such entries with classmates. After discussions with peers and critical analysis of the literature, students write a second journal entry synthesizing insights gained from discussion, analysis, readings, and writings. The journal (1) activates prior knowledge and present feelings, (2) encourages collaborative learning, (3) integrates major language skills, and (4) fosters creativity and discovery. Although several approaches to subjective criticism exist, David Bleich's three-step response is most useful. In the "percept" stage, students select the "percept" or most important word, phrase or sentence in the work, and support it with explanations, while in the "affect" stage, students describe raw emotions related to the perception. In the "association" stage, writers/readers consider times in their lives when they have had similar feelings or experiences. During small group discussion, members engage in synthesizing, looking for commonality in the group's perceptions. The integrating of reading, writing, speaking, and listening--emphasized throughout this approach--generates new ideas, new connections, and new insights. After writing the affective response, sharing this response in the small groups, and discussing the literature in class, the reader/writer returns to the journal and writes a second entry--with new insights, further understanding, and heightened perceptions. Each writer then has an opportunity for clarifying, gaining new information, or reexamining the literature. (HTH)

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Connecting the Language Arts:
The Double-Entry Journal in Literature Classes
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We believe that to read without writing is an incomplete experience. It is within the experience of writing that we often discover what it is we could not previously articulate about our reading. The double-entry journal requires students to write affective response statements to readings, and to compare such entries with classmates. After discussion with peers and critical analysis of the literature, students write a second journal entry synthesizing insights gained from discussion, analysis, readings, and writings. This use of the journal leads students to discoveries throughout the process: while reading and while writing.

Our discussion in this paper examines the double-entry journal approach and reviews the theory behind it. We believe the double-entry journal will lead our students to achieving four goals: activating prior knowledge and present feelings, learning collaboratively, integrating major language skills, and creating and discovering. These goals are highly interactive in the double-entry journal approach.

Within our literature classes, students are required to keep the double-entry journal throughout the semester. After each reading assignment, students make their first entry into the journal, an affective response to the reading. Because the first journal entry is affective, the writing leads students to discover the universal qualities of the literature. That is, readers find how their experiences are similar to those in the literature. Although several approaches to subjective criticism exist, we have found the work of David Bleich, Readings and Feelings (1975), to be most useful in the

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classroom. Bleich suggests a three-step response, starting with what he calls the percept. First, the students are asked to find what they considered to be the most important word, phrase, or sentence within the literature being studied. For example, responding to Robert Frost's "Birches", one student chose "conquered," another "across the lines of straighter darker trees," another "going and coming back," and the fourth wrote "reminiscing," even though this word does not appear within the poem. After selecting the word, students support their response with explanations.

Following these explanations, readers respond affectively to this selection. They try to express how they feel about what they have perceived as most important within the literature. This section is not an evaluation of the literature, a frequent student assumption, but rather a response to the reader's own perceptions. The second step, the affect, asks the reader to describe the raw emotions related to the perception. Usually these are familiar terms - anger, love, jealousy, indignation, contentment, resentment and so forth. Sometimes the stimulus touches a primordial feeling that the intellect can not readily describe. Nevertheless, the questions probe further: What are your feelings about "conquered"? What feelings are provoked by the entire work? As one reader said of "Birches," "Frost has hit a nerve with this poem." Expressing these feelings leads to further understanding.

The third step of the affective response, the association, requires writers/readers to consider times in their lives when they have had similar experiences and/or feelings. Although steps one and two usually prepare students for this part of the response, sometimes students are at a loss here. For example, when reading "Oedipus Rex," students became so involved in the mother-son marriage that they could not recognize how this literature is universal. But when they re-examined words and phrases they had identified as

being most important (e.g. "fate and free will," "blind to truth," "the dangers of truth," "pride"), these students were able to recognize themselves within the literature. Focusing on their initial responses will help them develop understanding and will lead to more associations. The first journal entry, then, is this three-step affective response, each section providing opportunities for discovery about the literature, and about self while writing.

These affective response statements activate prior knowledge and present feelings, our first goal. Underpinnings for this objective are found in a number of theories including the psycholinguistic model of reading, studies in cognition, and subjective criticism. Frank Smith's observation that "Nothing is comprehended if it does not reflect or elaborate on what the reader already knows," (62) affirms our own learning experiences. Similarly Louise Rosenblatt argues convincingly that a poem can only be created when there is a "coming-together or compenetration" of reader and text. The reader, she continues "brings to the text his past experience and present personality" (12). We agree that it is not just prior knowledge that must be brought to conscious awareness but also emotions and feelings associated with both present and past experiences. Which comes first? David Bleich makes his preference clear when he writes that "all biographies of those who achieved the most and best in civilization show that not only does feeling precede knowledge but that knowledge is achieved only because of the passion to know and discover. The passion precedes the knowledge -not vice versa" (3). With activated knowledge and feelings, the reader interacts with the text. We should add here that subjective criticism does not negate the value of the text. But instead, it makes clear, as Rosenblatt states, "The finding of meanings involves both the author's text and what the reader brings to it" (14).

As a result of their first journal entry, students come to class prepared to share their entries and to listen to those of others. In these small group discussions, each student, without teacher intervention, begins to recognize various levels of response as well as any serious misreadings or oversimplifications of the literature. Sometimes there is excessive detachment from the text or over-eagerness to appropriate the poem to some larger preoccupation of the reader. Here is an opportunity for the instructor to intervene beneficently. These problems can be addressed with such questions as, "Why do I think I saw the poem in just this way? Is there anything I know about myself that must explain this particular kind of perception?" Reader responses become the object of objectivity.

During small group discussion, members engage in synthesizing, looking for commonality in the group's perceptions, feelings, and associations. Initial responses are compared to the group's response with members noting what might be added to their own statements. Students jot down ways their responses differ from others, and make notes for future revisions.

We consciously promote collaborative learning with the double-entry journal and related activities. The use of small groups becomes our main vehicle. Ken Bruffee observes that common to both Kuhn and Vygotsky is the view that knowledge, thought, and learning are involved with "ways of seeing tested and shared by a community of knowledgeable peers" (163). Bruffee goes on to quote Richard Rorty that what is special about language is that it lets us "enter a community whose members exchange justification of assumptions and other actions with one another" (167). Placing the small group work between the two journal entries provides a "community" in which readers and writers can test and share their knowledge and feelings.

Concerns coming out of small group discussions often become the focus of class discussions. For example, in a discussion of Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," one group of students wished to pursue further Hawthorne's use of light and dark throughout the story while others wanted to analyze further the dream qualities in this work. Still another group explored the allegorical Robin as young colonial America. At this point, we have no directives for teachers, but rather we believe that each teacher should handle literature as he or she prefers. Our own approaches differ here as each of us focuses on a different school of criticism. But whichever criticism is preferred, it takes on new meaning when the reader examines how an author created the perceptions and the feelings previously identified by the reader. Imagery, symbolism, motifs, archetypes, all have new meaning as a result of the process previously described.

The integrating of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, emphasized throughout this approach, generates new ideas, new connections, and new insights. Vygotsky in Mind in Society observes that the "most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge..." (quoted in Bruffee, 160). Our experiences would have us rephrase this to say that it is a most significant time in intellectual development of students when all four activities of reading, writing, speaking, and listening converge. Bruffee emphasizes this need for integrating: "In order to learn to write, we must learn to become our own representatives of an assenting community of peers with whom we speak and to whom we listen in our heads" (161). The sequence of reading about literature, writing responses

in the journal, talking and listening about these responses in small groups, and then synthesizing these findings in a second journal entry provides the full exploration of the subject and "the coming to know" that only integration of all four skills can achieve.

After writing the affective response, sharing this response in the small groups, and discussing the literature in class, the reader/writer returns to the journal. With new insights, with further understanding, and with heightened perceptions, the student writes the second entry. Here is the opportunity for each writer to discover and to articulate his or her own thoughts and feelings.

Some writers return to the affective response statement for clarification, for new information, for a new examination of the literature. These writers/readers note how their responses have changed and look for clues to such changes. One student wrote that she listened to others in her group discuss their perceptions of John Steinbeck's "Flight" and realized that they all chose sentences with "deep meaning toward Pepe becoming a man." Her first selection, she observed, "was not deep or philosophical but only had a meaning to me." (This response is worth a conference and/or class discussion in itself.) The group discussion, she goes on to write in her second entry, "opened my eyes to a lot of things I had missed and made me stop and think... brought out my true feelings." Many things are simultaneously occurring in the double-entry journal process, not the least is what Louise Rosenblatt says is necessary for a reader's creation of a poem from a text: "...an active, self-ordering, and self-corrective process" (11). The change in the reader does not come from an authoritative figure full of critical canon, but rather from a highly activated sense of the worth of the student's own experience combined with reading the text, writing about prior experience and feelings, and discussing these with a community of peers.

The second journal entry provides students the opportunity to pursue questions raised in class discussions concerning the literature. In second journal entries for "Birches," one student investigated when Frost wrote this poem, searching for a relationship between Frost's life and his poetry. A second student focused on Frost's metaphors, while a third analyzed qualities of the birch tree, ending "...our birch swinging days are gone forever." All entries touched on the universality of yearning to be a "swinger of birches." Each writer brings small group concerns, class comments, and further examination of the literature to this second journal entry. Here is the time for synthesis, for reflection, and for integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The connections are many.

Our final goal of enhancing creativity and discovery is achieved by students integrating language skills, activating knowledge and feelings, and collaborating with peers. When we are involved in all four language skills, especially writing, we can more fully explore the subject. When we activate our prior knowledge and present feelings before and during the reading, writing, speaking, and listening, we can maximize our chances of both learning and discovering. As Donald Murray says about writing, "We discover what we know and then what we need to know" (3). The bottom line, as the accountants say, for the double-entry journal approach is that this process has the potential to contribute to the creating of a work of literature from a text and to the discovering of new insights in both reading and life. As one of our students said, "Our journals often know more than we do."

Resources

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